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ABSTRACT

Television programming has a huge impact on the lives of children. This lesson focuses on the stereotypical and racial messages that are portrayed through television programming with a focus on situational comedies. During the four 45-minute lessons, grade 6-8 students will: analyze portrayals of different groups of people in the media; investigate social values presented in the media; analyze portrayals of teenagers in the media; identify stereotypes presented through the media; and investigate television's influence on personal and societal values. The instructional plan, lists of web resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A media observation sheet and a media awareness scavenger hunt worksheet are attached. (RS)

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Critical Media Literacy: TV Programs

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

Four 45-minute classes

Overview

This lesson provides a platform in which students can critically analyze popular television programs. The media has a huge effect on popular culture. Television programs underscore stereotypes of various groups of people. By looking at the media critically, students develop an awareness of the messages that are portrayed through the media.

From Theory to Practice

Luke, C. (May, 1999). Media and cultural studies in Australia. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 42,* 622-626.

- TV is a powerful source of social learning that shapes attitudes, social and consumer behaviors, and people's worldviews. The critical study of televisual texts, therefore, remains an important component of a critical literacy program.
- The teaching on analytic skills aims to develop new strategies for thinking about the meanings media transmit and the meanings viewers construct for themselves.
- The study of TV and other mass media, new interactive media, and popular culture is important not only because of their profound influence and pervasiveness, but because of the ways that media easily become "naturalised."

Considine, D. (October, 2002). Putting the ME in MEdia literacy. *Middle Ground: The Magazine of Middle Level Education, 6,* 15-21.

- The world of the adolescent cannot be understood without considering the profound influence of the mass media.
- Media literacy can empower youth to be positive contributors to society, to challenge cynicism and apathy, and to serve as agents of social change.
- In ignoring advertising, TV, movies, video games, and contemporary music, we are in fact ignoring a significant part of the nature and needs of our students.

Shepherd, R. (1992). Elementary media education: The perfect curriculum. *English Quarterly,* 25, 2-3.

- Children have vast amounts of information thrust upon them, much of it from media sources, much of it verbal or written, much of it visual, much of it manipulative. It is the child's task to make sense of it all, to construct reality from this information.

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Student Objectives

Students will

- Analyze portrayals of different groups of people in the media
- Investigate social values presented in the media
- Analyze portrayals of teenagers in the media
- Identify stereotypes presented through the media
- Investigate television's influence on personal and societal values

Resources

- Media Observation sheet
- Media Awareness Scavenger Hunt sheet
- Online article: Skills & Strategies for Media Education
- Online article: A Different World: Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in Media
- Videotape of popular sitcom from television

Instructional Plan

Preparation

- Read the two online articles.
- Videotape a sitcom that is popular with your students.
- Plan time in the computer lab to complete the scavenger hunt activity.
- Make copies of the Media Observation sheet and Media Awareness Scavenger Hunt sheet

Instruction and Activities

Day 1

Use the following guiding questions to help generate a discussion about media literacy:

- What is the media?
- How does the media make you feel?
- Has any information you received from the media ever angered you? Made you feel really good?
- Do you feel represented in the media (i.e., race, sex, age, talents, strengths, weaknesses, background, ethnicity)?

- Who is visible and who is invisible within the media?
- Are there certain issues or groups of people represented more often than others in the media? Why do you think this is the case?
- Do you think the media stereotypes certain people? Who? How?

Day 2

During class, view the videotape of a popular television program. Model the media observation activity by stopping the video to discuss various components of the activity included on the activity sheet.
Give students the Media Observation sheet. For homework, have students view a television program and complete the questions on the observation sheet.

Day 3

Discuss the findings from the students' media observation activity. Rate programs that students viewed on a scale of 1-3.

3 = realistic

2 = somewhat realistic

1 = unrealistic

Day 4

Give students the Media Awareness Scavenger Hunt sheet. Students should complete activity items 1-12 by logging on to the media awareness website using the Web address provided on the activity sheet.
For homework, have students complete the writing activity at the bottom of the Scavenger Hunt sheet.

Extensions

- Students share the TV programs they developed with the class
- Students perform skits based on the TV programs they developed

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Student participation in discussions
- Student participation in activities
- Media observation activity
- Scavenger hunt activity

IRA/NCTE Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

7 - Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8 - Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Media Observation Sheet

Directions:

1. Choose a drama or sitcom that centers on teen characters.
2. Complete all the documentation information on the program.
3. Answer all the questions carefully in complete sentences and/or paragraphs.

Documentation:

Name of TV program: _____

Channel or network: _____ Time show started: _____ ended: _____

Questions:

1. Describe a major problem or conflict that the teens face on this show.
2. How is the problem or conflict resolved?
3. In your opinion, is this the real way teens deal with this kind of problem or conflict? Why or why not?
4. Describe the main character(s) in the show.
5. Are the teen characters exaggerated or stereotyped in this show? In what way?
6. Are there characters that are portrayed positively?
7. Are there characters that are portrayed negatively?
8. Would you want to be like any of the characters portrayed on the show? Why or why not?

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Name: _____

Media Awareness Scavenger Hunt

Log on to the following website:

http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/issues/minerep/resource/reports/dworld.htm

Answer the following questions based on the article *A Different World: Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in the Media.*

1. How many children participated in the survey?
2. What four races were included in the survey?
3. What would the "perfect" TV show have in it?
4. What type of program do Latinos most frequently watch?
5. What two people were listed as favorites by all four races?
6. What two races are shown the least on television?
7. Characters from what race are most likely to be portrayed in a negative manner?
8. Characters from what race are most likely to be portrayed in a positive manner?
9. Describe the stereotypical qualities of white characters on television.
10. Describe the stereotypical qualities of minority characters on television.
11. What two races are portrayed negatively through the news?
12. Explain the results of the survey regarding newscasters and race.

Writing Activity

If you were to develop a new TV program, what would it be like? In your description, include the following components:

*type of show
*content of the show
*setting
*characters (main/supporting)
*rating of show
*audience
*when you would "air" the show

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